Written in the Stars

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Written in the Stars

by sourweather

Summary

Adam has always been practical. He doesn't believe in fate, or destiny. He doesn't think that everything happens for a reason.

And yet, meeting Nigel Banyai doesn't feel like an accident.

Notes

weee im so obsessed with this fic i love language barriers SO much eeeee

I wrot ethis in. september, i think? only 2 more of these until next year!

See the end of the work for more notes

Adam's mother was a strange person. Then again, most people are pretty strange, in Adam's eyes. Prone to doing, saying things that don't make much sense. But she was especially strange.

Spiritual, that was what she called it. She wasn't religious— Adam and his parents only went to a synagogue when they were visiting his grandparents, only observed holidays that involved flying out to visit them. She definitely believed in something, though.

Their house was filled with tokens. Little trinkets that sat in windowsills to soak up the sun, or near candles, or pinning down scraps of paper. He remembered being little and trying to play with them, thinking that they were just tchotchkes that served no real purpose. His mother, gently but leaving no room for arguments, told him that the little crystals and coins lying about were actually there for important reasons, and that they shouldn't be moved.

She had a small collection of tarot decks, some of them very well-worn. Adam would sometimes flip through them, looking at the art on each card and reorganizing them once they'd been shuffled around. His mother tried on many occasions to teach him how to interpret the cards, but he would always become frustrated when she couldn't explain the particulars of how they were meant to work. He couldn't understand how there could be any wisdom or power in a stack of cards, a chunk of crystal, a dried plant.

Patiently, she told him that there were larger forces at play than he knew. Unseen hands, pulling at strings. 'Everything happens for a reason,' she'd told him, so many times that imagining her saying the words is the only way that Adam can reliably recall her voice.

Most importantly, at least in relation to her son, she was always aware of the planets and their positions. She knew the phase of the moon, which constellations were in which part of the sky at any given time. The reason that she kept track wasn't something Adam found particularly interesting— he still didn't understand how the orientation of the planets could have any bearing on his disposition— but he was always eager to sit out on their apartment balcony and listen to her as she softly explained the stars.

It was inevitable, really, that something of hers would be passed on to him. Some tiny serving of mysticism, a reverence for the universe overhead. He remembered with absolute clarity the feeling of staring at the night sky, held in his mother's arms, and being struck by the awe of the cosmos. The overwhelming sense that he was, as she often said, a part of something more than he could ever comprehend.

But their similarities ended there. Adam was a practical person, even as a child. He didn't believe in spirituality, magic, or luck. And he certainly didn't believe in fate. His mother did not die for a reason, and he wasn't left without her for a reason, either. The universe is a chaotic, dangerous numbers game, built on randomness and probability and patterns.

There are approximately eight million people living in New York City. That means that the likelihood of meeting any given person, excluding tourists, is about .0000125%. But then again, Adam sees lots of people every day, and he's been living here since he was born. If he

saw a hundred new people every day, even just in passing, then it would only be one in eighty thousand. It was practically guaranteed to happen.

...Once every two hundred and twenty years.

Still, it doesn't strike Adam as particularly extraordinary when, on his walk from the bus stop to work that dreary autumn morning, a stranger's body crashes into his own. He certainly doesn't feel like he's won some sort of once-in-three-lifetimes opportunity as his work bag falls from his arms, notes and supplies and his laptop case scattering all over the busy sidewalk.

Adam stumbles, barely steadies himself before he can go spilling onto the pavement. He stares dumbly down at his fallen things for a moment, wincing as a woman in tall, clicking heels steps directly onto a freshly-printed report and leaves a distinctive print in her wake.

The stranger who has effectively ruined his morning exclaims something in a language Adam doesn't understand, and it shocks Adam back into motion. He drops to the ground, reaching for his laptop just before it can be stampeded by oncoming foot traffic and hoping desperately that it wasn't smashed in the fall.

He looks up when he sees a shape in his periphery. A man is kneeling on the pavement beside him. The man who ran into him, still speaking hurriedly in that same unfamiliar language. Adam watches him as he begins to gather up fallen papers, snatching them from the ground in large, tanned hands.

"Îmi pare rău, omule. S-ar putea să fiu încă puțin beat de aseară—" He stops speaking, suddenly. Looks Adam in the face. His sharp face breaks into a strange grin, one that makes Adam's confused frown deepen. The man laughs roughly, gestures at Adam with the papers.

"Rahat sfânt! Ți-a spus cineva vreodată că eşti al naibii de superbă?"

"I don't—"Adam points to himself, speaking very clearly as if it makes any difference. "I can't understand you, I'm sorry."

The man mutters something else, scowling at the papers in his hands for a moment before passing them to Adam.

"Thank you," he says, quickly stuffing them back into his bag. He pauses in gathering his things for a moment, watching the other man with an inexplicable fascination. He can't quite place it, but something inside of Adam's head makes him hesitant to look away.

The stranger collects a handful of stray ink pens, a pack of note cards, a mostly-empty box of paper clips. Most of them are strewn about the sidewalk now, and the man looks as if he knows it wouldn't be worth the effort to collect them all. Adam thanks him again when he deposits his findings into Adam's waiting hands.

The man looks Adam in the face again, brows drawing together in apparent concentration. Eventually he smiles and says

“You…” he nods to Adam. “You, uh… *dracu*— it’s good, yeah?”

Adam blinks, confused for a moment before he suddenly understands. “Oh,” he says, and the stranger grins victoriously. “Um, yes, I’m okay.” He stands, dusting off his pants and glancing at his watch. He’s running late for work. The odds really weren’t playing in his favor today. He gives one last awkward nod to the stranger, watching as he begins to walk away, then hurries off down the sidewalk.

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“Oh, no.”

Adam reaches out, fingers shaking when they meet the screen of his laptop. There’s a large crack that spans across a quarter of the display, and a few dead pixels near what seemed to be the point of impact. He winces, checking over the rest of the device with held breath. At least the crack seems to be the extent of the damage. It’s upsetting, especially because he’s had this laptop for more than five years now, but it could be much worse. It’s still usable, for now.

“What’s up?”

He looks up to find one of his coworkers, standing just behind his chair. Lauren. She’s nice enough, but he often finds it difficult to talk to her. He finds it difficult to talk to most people.

“I dropped my laptop, on the way in this morning,” he explains, gesturing to the damaged screen with a slight sigh. “A man on the street wasn’t watching where he was going properly and ran into me, it must have cracked on the sidewalk.”

Lauren hisses through her teeth, as if she’d just fallen herself. “That’s too bad, I’m sorry.”

Adam shrugs. “I don’t get knocked over very often for how much walking I do, I guess it was bound to happen eventually.”

She snorts. “That’s a very zen way of looking at things.”

“Is it? I don’t know much about Buddhism.”

Lauren opens her mouth, but the words don’t leave right away. “Neither do I,” she says a bit awkwardly. “I just meant that it’s cool that you’re not letting it get to you.”

Another shrug. It occurs to him then that he really should be angrier at the man responsible for the damages. But when he recalls their interaction, the only feeling that rises is that odd sense of curiosity. “I am upset. But… I don’t know, it was an accident.”

“If I were you I would’ve chased the guy down and made him pay for a replacement,” Lauren argues.

He sighs. “Maybe I should have.”

“I have a buddy who fixes computers, you want me to take it to him? See if he’ll give you a quote to get it fixed up?”

Adam smiles at that, his mood lifting a little. “That would be great, actually. Thank you.”

She nudges his shoulder in a way that he assumes is meant to be playful. “No worries. Maybe your luck’s about to turn around.”

“Oh, I don’t believe in luck.”

That makes her chuckle and shake her head, but Adam can’t quite work out why. “Of course you don’t.”

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Of course, probability isn’t as simple as observing flat, neutral figures. Adam is not observing the citizens of New York City at random. There are biases at play. Preferences, routines. And the human mind loves latching onto patterns.

So while Adam is aware that the odds of seeing the same stranger twice in this city is technically only a one in sixty-four trillion chance, he’s also aware that he was more likely to notice him after their first memorable encounter. It’s entirely possible that he’s crossed paths with this man many times, even— they might have similar habits, or live in the same neighborhood.

It’s still more difficult than it should be for Adam to call it random chance.

He’s at his favorite coffee shop, early in the morning. It’s still overcast outside. Adam hasn’t seen the sun or stars in days, and it’s starting to take a toll on him. He slept poorly the night before, and in an attempt to brighten his low mood, he’d left for work with enough time to stop by a cafe. The line was long, and more people were queuing in behind him by the moment, but he tried to ignore the crowd and just be patient. Still, he’s nearly late again by the time he reaches the counter.

Adam musters a polite smile, orders his favorite English Breakfast tea with a splash of milk, taps his card on the reader.

Declined.

He frowns, tries his card again. Declined. “There’s definitely money on this,” he assures the overtired barista as it declines for a third time. “I just got paid two days ago, the account has money in it.” Again, again, it declines.

“Do you have another card you could try, sir?” the barista asks.

“This one is supposed to work!” Adam insists. “Why would I need another?”

The barista rolls his eyes, and Adam desperately tries his card once more. He knows that the result won’t be any different, but he can’t resist the urge to do it anyway.

“Sir, can I ask you to step out of the line while you work out what’s going on with your card?” he asks, and nods over Adam’s shoulder. “There are people waiting on you.”

Adam shakes his head despairingly. “No, I already waited in the line, I won’t have time to wait again!” He reaches for the machine.

“Your card isn’t working, sir,” the barista sighs. “I’m sorry, but I can’t—”

Suddenly Adam hears movement behind him. He looks over his shoulder to find a large man barging his way to the front of the line, with a severe look on his face. Immediately, his shoulders draw up, his body turning tense.

The man looks at the barista, looming just at Adam’s side. He’s a towering presence, especially up close— solidly built and six inches taller than Adam, at least. Adam fights the need to make himself even smaller, to run for the exit as quickly as he can.

“I pay,” the man says, voice low around a thick accent, and suddenly it clicks. Adam has met this stranger before.

The barista blinks. “Excuse me?”

“I pay,” the stranger repeats, gesturing pointedly to Adam. “For his. And black coffee, two sugar.”

As he speaks, he grabs some cash from his wallet, thrusting it in the barista’s direction. The barista takes it, thanking them for their patronage in a tone that even Adam is able to recognize as sarcastic. The stranger’s lip twitches upward.

“Yeah yeah, keep change, *nenorocitule,”* he mutters, moving with Adam to stand aside and wait for their drinks. As soon as they’re away from the counter, the man seems to relax a little. He looks down at Adam, flashing that same toothy grin he’d given him the last time they met.

“Salut din nou, superbă.”

Adam smiles, nods up at the stranger. “Hello again,” he says, slowly. “Um, thank you for buying my drink. That was very kind of you.”

A part of Adam doubts that he caught most of that, but he looks pleased regardless. “It’s paying you,” he says, a bit stilted, then points to Adam’s messenger bag. “For the computer, yeah?”

“Oh.” Adam could— and likely should— mention that the price of repairing this laptop screen would be much, much more than the price of one cup of tea. But instead he just says “Okay. I appreciate that,” and waits for his drink.

The two of them stand in awkward silence for a minute, maybe two. All the while, Adam is aware of the stranger’s eyes on him. Watching, though Adam can’t begin to guess at why. Perhaps he shares the urge that Adam is feeling, the alien pull to draw closer. A call to engage.

Eventually it becomes a bit too much for Adam to take, and he turns to face the other man. “You have an interesting accent,” he notes. “Where are you from?”

His stare is concentrated but neutral as Adam speaks, but a moment later he blinks and then seems to piece things together. “Romania,” he replies.

“Oh, I’ve never met anyone from Romania before.”

The other man keeps smiling at him, despite clearly not understanding much of what he’s saying. Adam’s not good enough with faces to be sure if it’s just blank politeness or not, but something about it feels… sincere. Like he just enjoys the sheer fact that Adam is speaking to him, divorced from any particular meaning behind the words.

“I’m Adam,” he blurts, thrusting out his hand a bit awkwardly. He’s never been good at meeting new people, and something about this person in particular sets him more off-kilter than usual, but it feels rude not to at least introduce himself after the man bought him tea.

“Adam,” the stranger echoes. His voice is rich and dark, his accent curling almost affectionately around the vowels. He takes Adam’s hand in his own, and Adam notes that his palm is very warm. “You call me Nigel.”

Adam nods. His own hand feels chilly when he pulls it away. “Okay. It’s nice to meet you, Nigel.”

His gaze flicks over Nigel’s appearance, then, observing him more closely than before. His sandy hair is a little greasy, strands of it falling in front of his hardened face. He’s wearing blue jeans, and a baggy button-down with dogs printed over its soft-looking fabric. His jaw is strong, stubbled. His lips… they curl into a smirk when Adam looks at them.

Adam ducks his head, wishing that his cheeks weren’t so warm. His eye catches a tattoo on Nigel’s forearm. Five stars, connected by thin lines and arranged in a pattern that Adam instantly recognizes. The constellation Aries.

“I like your tattoo,” Adam says.

Nigel cocks a curious brow, one hand reaching up to cover the other tattoo on his neck. It’s a pinup girl, its lines a bit blurry with time. “Yeah?”

Adam wrinkles his nose, shaking his head. Nigel chuckles. “No, um, that one,” he clarifies, pointing to the one on the other man’s arm. “Are you an Aries?” Adam had never been interested in astrology, but he didn’t think that someone would get a tattoo of something so specific if it didn’t bear some personal significance. Then again, he couldn’t imagine what significance a pinup girl could possibly hold.

The other man grins wide, proudly holding up his arm to give Adam a clear look. “Aries, yeah. You read the stars, *superbă?”*

Adam nods, smiling back. “Yes, I do. Um, not horoscopes, though. I’m an astronomer.” His smile falls, realizing that the words likely don’t mean much. “That is, I study—”

“No, it’s good. *Astronomie,* yeah? *Un savant,* I see.” He narrows his eyes, tilting his head a bit. “But do you listen?”

He blinks, frowning in confusion. “Listen to what?”

Nigel steps closer, leaning down a bit. He crowds Adam, but the instinct to shy away doesn’t appear. Instead he’s flooded with that curious feeling again, that foreign unwillingness to look away. When Nigel speaks, it’s nearly a whisper. A secret. “The stars, they speak, you know? To you, to me. You listen?”

Adam’s lips part, but no words come out. He’s stunned, for a moment. Grasping. Who *is* this man?

Whatever response he might have eventually produced gets cut off, though. The barista sets Adam’s tea and Nigel’s coffee on the counter, moving to tend to the customers still in line without a word. Nigel saunters up to the counter, picks up their drinks in each hand, passes Adam his cup.

“You going?” Nigel prods, lifting one fine brow. “Or do we sit and talk more?”

And to his surprise, Adam finds that he’s actually a bit disappointed. That if he didn’t have somewhere to be, he might actually like to stay and make stilted conversation with Nigel, at least for a little while. What’s gotten into him? It’s not like him to be so interested in a stranger.

He shakes his head, a bit regretful. “No, I’m sorry, I can’t stay. I have to go to work now. But thank you again, for the drink.”

Nigel nods, lifting his coffee to Adam in something like a toast. “I see you again, Adam.”

And Adam offers him a tiny smile. “Maybe.”

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“Lauren?”

She looks up at him, hunched over her reheated leftovers with her fork halfway to her mouth. “Yeah?”

They’d taken to eating lunch together, recently. Her idea. At first Adam hadn’t been sure about breaking from his usual routine of sharing meals with Harlan, but he’d been a very vocal supporter of Adam spending time with someone his own age, so Adam agreed.

Adam frowns down at the sandwich he’d been pecking at. He knows that his body is hungry, logically he knows this, but his appetite isn’t making an appearance. He’s been feeling off all day, actually, that strange energy still clinging to him. He can’t seem to shake it, it’s making him struggle to focus.

He hesitates before he asks. He knows that it will sound stupid, but he can’t sit for another minute with the words buzzing around in his head. “Do you ever feel like the stars are… trying to tell you something?”

As expected, she looks at him like it's the strangest thing she's ever heard. "What do you mean?" she asks around her food, and Adam shrugs.

"I don't really know," he sighs. He rests his temple on his hand, letting some of his frustration show. "I talked to this man, today. He told me that the stars were speaking to me, that I should listen to them. It was all very strange."

"Woah, cryptic. He just stopped you on the street, or…?"

Adam shakes his head. "No, we were at a cafe. He bought me tea."

Lauren's eyebrows raise. "He bought you a drink?"

"Mhm. He said that he was paying me back for knocking my bag out of my hands, last week."

"It was the same guy?" Lauren asks. When Adam nods, Lauren smirks. "And he told you that… the universe was telling you something."

"The stars," he corrects.

She chuckles. Adam doesn't think it's very funny. He scowls when she reaches out and places a hand atop his own. "Honey," she says, and Adam likes Lauren but he hates it when she calls him that. "I think he was hitting on you."

His frown only deepens, but his pulse stutters unexpectedly. "That doesn't make any sense."

Lauren isn't swayed. "It was literally something ripped from a bad rom-com."

"I wouldn't know," Adam replies, finally gabbing for the small bag of chips beside his sandwich. Maybe he can at least eat these. "I've never seen one, I don't like romance movies. They're even less realistic than sci-fi stories; no one in real life acts like that."

"No one except for your mysterious new friend," Lauren argues. She grins, leaning even closer over the table. "Was he hot? Did you like him?"

Adam shrinks away from her a bit, sitting back in his chair. "I don't know."

"What do you mean, you don't know?"

He huffs. His cheeks feel hot, and he knows that they're turning pink. "He was very handsome," Adam concedes, quickly, like he's eager to get the sentence over with. "But he barely spoke English, and I can't tell whether or not I like someone until I get to know them."

"Well, if you see him again, maybe you should 'listen to the stars' and ask him out," she suggests.

"The odds of that happening are so low that it's basically impossible," he points out, even though it had already happened once. "And I wouldn't want to date somebody I hardly know."

Lauren sighs in light frustration, stabbing a sun dried tomato with the end of her plastic fork. “Adam, getting to know someone is the point of a first date. It’s like an interview.”

Maybe that’s why he’s always hated first dates. “I don’t like interviews. Nobody likes interviews.”

She chuckles. “I’m just saying that you don’t have to be in love with the guy to ask him on one date. It’s okay to be impulsive. Look: do you want to see him again?”

Adam doesn’t need to think it over. Nigel is strange, and he doesn’t fully understand why he’s so drawn to him, but he is. Shyly, his blush rising, he nods.

“Then here’s what you’re gonna do:” She sets her mostly-empty Tupperware aside, snatching a post-it and an ink pen from the break room counter. As she speaks, she jots down the words in sharp, angular scribbles.

“If you see him again, and you feel like he’s flirting, then you’re going to look at him and say ‘Are you single?’. Easy as pie, just three words. And then if he says yes, you’re going to say ‘Would you want to go out together sometime?’. That’s all. Doesn’t have to be complicated, or weird, or stressful.”

Adam rolls his eyes, but when she offers him the post-it, he takes it and shoves it into his pocket. “I’ll think about it,” he surrenders. He’s been thinking about Nigel all day as it is, it won’t hurt him to think about this, too.

“Good.” Lauren places a hand on his shoulder, and this time Adam lets her. “Because I know you’re saying that you’re not a romantic, but I think that, deep down, you really do want to fall in love. Don’t you?”

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The stress is starting to get to him.

Adam knows that fixating on the negative doesn’t help anyone, that he should really be trying to make the best of things. It doesn’t change the fact that he’s been unhappy, lately.

It isn’t even that something particularly bad has happened. More accurately, it feels like there’s been a shortage of good things. His job doesn’t excite him as much as it used to, his hobbies aren’t as fulfilling. Food doesn’t taste the same.

Even the weather seems to have gotten the memo, because after days on end of nothing but gloomy skies and the occasional autumn chill, it was pouring rain when he left work this evening. He sighs to himself, worming his way onto the overcrowded bus. It’s packed to bursting with people, much more so than on an average Thursday. Adam imagines that it’s due to the rain, leading people who would ordinarily walk to choose the bus instead. Whatever the reason, it makes his mood plummet even lower.

There aren’t any seats available, leaving him to stand uncomfortably close to a cluster of strangers. There’s nowhere he can go that allows him to avoid brushing against someone

every few seconds, and Adam tries to take a deep breath and shake it off but it makes him want to scream.

He stares helplessly at the nearest window, fat raindrops pattering against it incessantly. The weather is a coincidence, of course. Just another unpleasant but ultimately random trait given to his day. As much as it might feel like the universe is transpiring against him, it's all just a coincidence.

"Adam! Hey, this way!"

Adam blinks from his thoughts, his pulse picking up as he turns. He's nearly embarrassed by how easily he smiles when he sees Nigel, how readily he shuffles through the crowd of passengers to reach him. Nigel smiles, too, beckoning with waves of his hand. He's sitting, knees spread wide with no regard for the people silently suffering around him.

"It's good to see you again, *superbă,"* he says, his accent thick as ever around the words despite obvious improvements to his grasp on the language. "I knew that I would."

"It's good to see you, too," Adam confesses, ducking his head a bit.

The bus jostles like it just hit a pothole, and Adam lurches with a startled yelp, nearly falling directly into Nigel's lap. His body breaks out in goosebumps when the other man reaches out, steadying him with a firm, warm hand. Nigel stands from his seat once the bus evens out, nodding toward his now vacant spot. "Here, you sit down, yeah?"

"Are you sure?" he asks, but he's already moving to sit. In seconds, he feels a measure of relief. Not only is he seated, but Nigel's broad frame serves to shield him from the majority of the other passengers.

Nigel waves his hand in a dismissive gesture, blowing air from his mouth. "It's nothing."

It isn't nothing, not to Adam. "Thank you. Um, again."

The other man just leans on a nearby pole, somehow completely unaffected by the crushing environment. It's like the crowd just parts around him, how does he do that? "You look tired. You going to work again?"

Adam shakes his head, rolling his shoulders in an attempt to dislodge the ever-present tension there. "I'm on my way home, actually. And yes, I am very tired."

"You work too hard," Nigel says, and Adam wants to argue but he's starting to think he might be correct. "I'm a bartender, you know. You come to my club sometime, I'll help you relax."

His recent conversation with Lauren comes rising from the back of his mind, at that. Because that, surely, was flirting. Wasn't it? "I… I don't drink. But I appreciate the offer."

An outburst of lightning flashes outside then, the resulting thunder so loud that it edges on violent. Adam's nerves wind up tight, and he grimaces.

Nigel doesn't seem fazed, though. By the rejection or the storm. "You dance, though, don't you?" he prods.

Adam shakes his head. Nigel narrows his eyes a bit, tipping his head to the side as he looks Adam up and down. He feels himself blushing again, fights the urge to hide.

"Maybe not where everyone can see," Nigel says, and his lips curl into a smirk that makes Adam's stomach swoop. "You and me, we go somewhere with no people, yeah *superbă?* Dance where nobody sees us."

His tone makes a giddy shiver rush up Adam's spine. A new energy floods his system, something nervous but pleasant. It makes him want to squirm in his seat. It's like magic, how his mood has gone from sinking to soaring in a matter of minutes. "What does that word mean?" he asks. "You always call me that."

Adam can't help but watch as Nigel licks his lips, his jagged smile returning a moment later. *"Superbă,"* Nigel says, nice and clear and slow. Adam feels like he might melt. He needs to hear it again, preferably whispered right in his ear. "I call you *superbă.* In English, it's like... ah, 'beautiful'. You like it?"

The bus rolls to an unsteady stop. He's red up to the tips of his ears, now, he's sure of it. He can hardly speak around the thudding of his heartbeat. "I— you think I'm beautiful?"

Nigel opens his mouth to reply, but then his attention flicks to something behind Adam. He bites out a string of curses, their origins a blend of English and Romanian. For a moment, Adam worries that he's done something wrong, but then the bus shakes to life with movement. Several passengers start shuffling their way to the front, one or two knocking into Nigel as they go.

Adam's heart sinks. "This is your stop, isn't it?" he asks.

Nigel licks his lips again, giving Adam a look that he can only interpret as pained. "Yeah. But I'll see you again, yes?" He joins the flow of disembarking passengers, turning back to look at him as he makes for the door. "Remember this face!" he calls, and then he's gone.

And for the first time, Adam wholeheartedly believes him. There's a certainty, taking root. One that wasn't there before. As unlikely as it is, Adam is sure that he'll see this man again.

So why is he more hesitant than ever to let him walk away?

Adam doesn't even realize that he's standing until he's on his feet. It's ridiculous, he knows that it is, but his body is moving without his permission. It's that pull again, tugging at him by the collar of his sweater and dragging him forward. Step by strange, stumbling step.

Maybe it's the storm, he reasons, unable to stop himself from trying to make some sense of it. Maybe it's the fact that the sky has been so grey and somber lately, and that he can't even make out the moon at night, let alone the stars. But it's like Adam can feel the saturation leaking from himself. From every hairline fracture in the walls of his apartment, the gaps under the doors at work, the spaces between his fingers.

He follows the pounding of his own heart to the front of the bus, stalling in front of the door just as it's about to close. The rain rages on outside, wind whipping at his face as his feet find dark pavement.

Adam doesn't know what's happening to him, why he's suddenly incapable of letting this go on another moment. All he knows is that the idea of going back to his apartment after seeing Nigel again makes him want to tear at his hair. It doesn't make any sense, but he feels it all the same, burning away in his chest as he breaks into a run down the rainy sidewalk.

Pedestrians curse at him, giving him dirty looks as he shoulders his way past them in his pursuit. He ignores them. The rain quickly soaks him to the bone, plastering his hair to his forehead and running in unpleasant rivulets beneath his collar.

"Nigel!"

The other man stops just before crossing the street, turning on his heel and flashing that handsome lopsided grin when he sees Adam chasing after him.

"You forget something?" he teases.

Adam comes to a stop mere inches from Nigel. He's short of breath from his impromptu dash, nervous excitement rushing through his veins and making him dizzy. He's shaking, he's dripping wet, he has no earthly idea what he's doing.

He has to lift himself on his toes to reach Nigel's face. His hand finds Nigel's shoulder, grips it to keep himself steady. And then Nigel's lips are pressed to his own.

It is, without contest, the most impulsive thing Adam's ever done. Even as he sighs into the kiss, melting when Nigel's hand moves to cup his wet nape, a voice in the back of Adam's head is screaming that he's being wildly reckless.

A larger part of him, though, is completely, unwaveringly sure that this is exactly where he's supposed to be. The moment that their lips meet, it's like something that has always been a little misshapen inside of him suddenly evens out. Some strange, undefinable something that he's been looking for since he was a child, staring wide-eyed at infinity and wondering what his place in it could be.

Adam falls back onto his heels when they part, his mouth tingling and alive where Nigel's soft, warm lips had been. The street is crowded, but it feels like they're the only people for miles and miles.

Maybe some things do happen for a reason.

It takes some effort for Adam to look Nigel in the face. He's terrified of what he might see. But when his eyes finally do flick up to dare a glance, Nigel is smiling.

"Are you single?" Adam blurts, raindrops flying from his lips as he speaks.

Nigel laughs. Hard. He tosses his head back with it. It might be the nicest sound Adam's ever heard. The anxiety brewing in Adam's chest bursts forth in a sudden giggle, and Nigel beams

down at him.

“Yeah, *superbă.* I’m all yours.”

Adam nods, jerky with excitement. He shuts his eyes, struggling to remember Lauren’s instructions when the only thing reliably on his mind is how badly he wants to kiss Nigel again. “I— um, do you want to go out together, sometime?”

Another laugh, softer, and then Nigel is bending down to catch Adam in another lingering kiss. This time Nigel has to be the one to pull away, because Adam has decided that he’d be content to kiss him for hours on end.

“Fuck, yes,” Nigel replies at last. “Yes, I fucking want that.”

Adam can’t wipe the grin from his face, but the rain and wind have started to make his teeth chatter. Nigel frowns, reaching out and cupping Adam’s face in both hands.

“You’re shaking,” he notes, visibly concerned. Adam hardly feels it. “You come with me to my club, yeah? Let me make you warm.”

Adam nearly swoons. He nods without hesitation. Right now, it feels like he would be willing to follow Nigel just about anywhere. The rain starts to let up a bit as they walk together, Adam’s hand grasped in Nigel’s, and by the time they reach their destination, a small ray of sunlight has begun peeking through the gloom.

End Notes

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